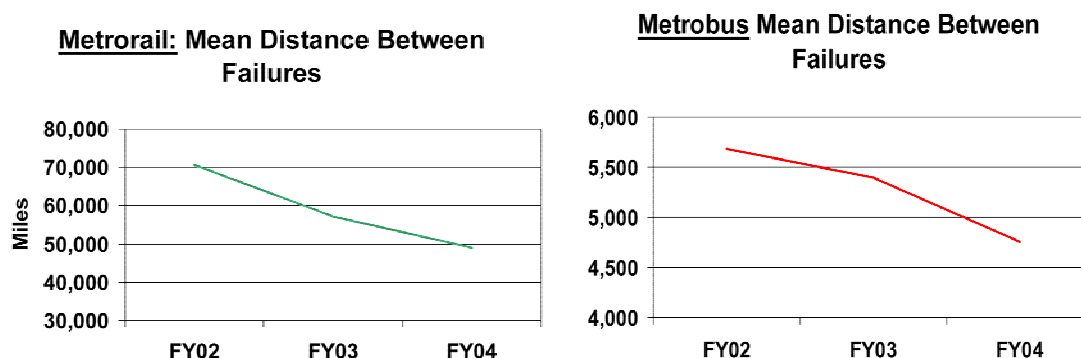


**Prepared Testimony of**  
**MetroRiders.Org**  
**The Capital Region's Critical Link**  
 Ensuring Metrorail's Future As a Safe, Reliable  
 And Affordable Transportation Option  
**Before the Committee on Government Reform**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
 Washington, D.C.  
 February 18, 2005

I am Jack Corbett, a director of MetroRiders.Org. MetroRiders.Org is the recently-established transit users group formed to help improve public transit services in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. We appreciate the invitation to present our views on the current problems and future needs of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), which operates Metrorail, Metrobus and the MetroAccess paratransit service.

MetroRiders.Org was formed this past Fall primarily because transit riders demand a safe, more reliable Metro system, as well as better coordination with the other bus and train systems serving our area. Whether or not you personally use the Metro system, you know that many Metrorail trains are chronically overcrowded; escalators and elevators don't work; and Metrorail cars and Metrobuses too often break down, causing riders to be late for work or getting home. Finally, two back-to-back annual fare hikes in 2003 and 2004 caused considerable resentment among riders particularly when the quality of rail and bus service had, by WMATA's own calculation, been declining so sharply.

**Figure 1.**



Source: WMATA, Report to Blue Ribbon Panel on WMATA Funding (October 7, 2004), p. 7.

## -- **Importance of Metro Transit System to the Capital Region**

WMATA's testimony this morning documents the critical importance of the Metrorail system to our entire region, in terms of personal mobility, economic development, and environmental protection. We believe that public transit is an essential governmental service that benefits everyone. The Federal Government benefits. If Metrorail must suspend operations because of deteriorating weather conditions, Federal Government agencies also must cease their operations, and employee dismissals must be staggered by Federal agencies to avoid overloading Metro's capacity. Without Metrorail, the recent Presidential Inauguration with its many visitors would have resulted in gridlock throughout the area.

Much of the benefit of public transit in our metropolitan area accrues to those who don't use Metrorail. Commuters on area roads would spend an extra 35 hours annually in traffic if Metrorail riders drove rather than using public transit. Every extra vehicle increases traffic congestion and delay disproportionately; commuters who drive benefit from the public investment in Metrorail that keeps transit users off the roads. In addition, transit lessens the region's air quality problem annually by tons of pollutants.

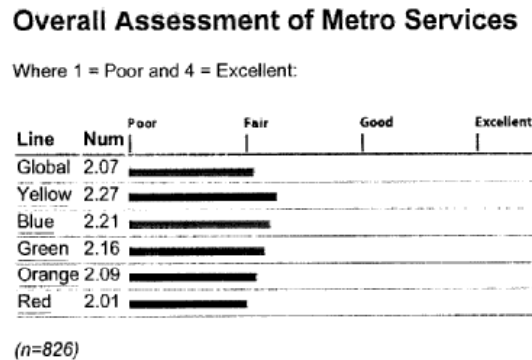
While the title of this most timely Congressional oversight hearing focuses on the importance of the Metrorail system to the region, the other two kinds of Metro transit services deserve special attention as well. In FY'2004, WMATA carried 336 million customers, 190 million on Metrorail and 146 million on Metrobus. In that same year 1.1 million trips on MetroAccess vans provided mobility for 14,000 area citizens with disabilities.

Conversations with Capitol Hill staffers on Metro issues too often are discussions only about Metrorail. To our transit riders, Metro also means bus service. Riders worry about safety, for bus drivers as well as passengers. Transit users are also concerned about personal safety in and near Metro stops and stations, and about adequate lighting in Metro parking lots, and about the responsiveness of Metro police when incidents occur.

## -- **Summary Results of Our Survey on Metro Operations**

The Committee's invitation indicated interest in the results of the Survey on Metro Operations that has been conducted on our web site ([www.metroriders.org](http://www.metroriders.org)). In short, respondents rated Metro's overall service quality as barely "fair" (2.07 on a 4 point scale).

**Figure 2.**



The detailed results are instructive (see attachment). Both Metrorail and Metrobus riders similarly identified delays in rail and bus service as the worst problem area (77 percent of respondents). Similarly, 77 percent of Metrorail riders and 48 percent of Metrobus riders identified overcrowding as a major problem. 52 percent of Metrorail riders and 18 percent of Metrobus riders stated that fares were too high. As to problems unique to each mode, Metrorail riders identified non-functioning elevators and escalators (64 percent) and Metrobus riders targeted buses not showing up (53 percent) as substantial problems.

## -- Metro Rider Criticisms Intended to Facilitate Improvements

Even though many daily transit riders have expressed their dissatisfaction with today's Metro operations, MetroRiders.Org's objective is a positive one: to improve the safety and reliability of today's Metro system and to assure that WMATA has good management and adequate funding resources for the future.

Also attached to our testimony is a list of our organization's short-term objectives. As you may notice, we believe everyone needs to do a better job. Specifically, MetroRiders.Org hopes that the WMATA Board and staff as well as the area jurisdictions that currently subsidize Metro's operations will respond favorably to our proposals.

## -- The 109<sup>th</sup> Congress Can Help WMATA's Short and Long-Term Future

Mr. Chairman, one benefit from today's hearing will be to highlight the amount of effort needed from the Maryland and Virginia Congressional delegations and the District of Columbia's Delegate to further WMATA's programs. Here are examples:

### 1. Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act

The new Congress hopes to complete within the first six months of this calendar year the reauthorization of the Federal highway and transit programs for five or six fiscal years. The House bill (H.R. 3) will be marked up soon. Under the current statutory formulas, WMATA should be eligible for substantial levels of Federal funding for new Metrorail

cars and buses. We hope that all area legislators will be as helpful as you have been in assuring that the final form of this legislation will maximize the availability of Federal grants for Metro's infrastructure.

## **2. FY'06 Congressional Appropriations**

Most of the subcommittees of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees will assemble next month a list of all projects that Members of Congress and U.S. Senators believe deserving of earmarked funding during FY'06. We hope that the area Congressional delegation will, as in past years, support earmarked funding for WMATA projects in what has been the Transportation/Treasury Appropriations bill.

Since September 2001, the limited security of public transit (subway) systems has become apparent, reinforced by the tragic incident in Madrid last year. How to provide adequate security in a system used daily by millions of commuters whose schedules cannot tolerate the level of individual scrutiny provided to today's air traveler is difficult. Even though the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittees have not earmarked funds for specific projects in past years, we hope that the area Congressional delegation will support WMATA's needs for substantial levels of security funding with their colleagues.

## **3. Amendment of WMATA Interstate Compact to Add a Rider Representative to the WMATA Board Of Directors**

Although we are pleased that WMATA may now be open to the establishment of a Passengers' Advisory Committee, MetroRiders.Org is convinced that this step, however well-intentioned, is too timid a response to the Metrorail, Metrobus and MetroAccess users' needs for input into WMATA decision-making. Transit riders were angered to read in recent months how few WMATA Board members actually use the bus and rail systems whose funding, operations, and culture they control. Only with the addition of a new Board member specifically to represent Metro system users will our needs be "heard" by WMATA Board members.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, WMATA's structure and organization is determined by an Interstate Compact since two states and the District of Columbia control WMATA. A new WMATA Board member can't be added without the favorable adoption of substantially similar legislation by these three jurisdictions, followed by approval from Congress. ...Only amending the U.S. Constitution is a more complex process than modifying WMATA's structure. We hope that, after the three jurisdictions have agreed, Congress will help facilitate an amendment to this Interstate Compact to add a rider representative to the WMATA Board.

#### **4. Facilitating Negotiations for Future Capital Funding for WMATA**

Early in January the Metro Funding Panel (co-sponsored by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the Federal City Council and the Greater Washington Board of Trade) released its report and recommendations for two states, the District of Columbia and local jurisdictions to consider adopting a “stable, reliable and dedicated” source of funding for WMATA’s future capital needs. Upon its release, unnamed officials in some jurisdictions intimated in the press that “This isn’t the year for increasing taxes” no matter how beneficial the objective. The issue has stalled since.

Mr. Chairman, we’re fearful that, without some Congressional leadership, there never will be a “good year” to resolve this issue. We hope you would consider calling another oversight hearing on WMATA matters for later this Spring to receive testimony from Governors Ehrlich and Warner, Mayor Williams and the chief executives of the other WMATA Contributing Jurisdictions. If you were to seek testimony on their jurisdictions’ reactions to the Metro Funding Panel’s report, and whether their jurisdictions would be willing to meet soon to discuss the next steps toward funding WMATA’s future, your intervention could offer a tremendous lift on this unresolved, important issue.

Again, MetroRiders.Org is grateful to this Committee for having scheduled today’s hearing and for the opportunity to present our views on Metro issues. I will be pleased to answer questions and to provide additional information for the hearing record. Thank you.

Attachments